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Influence of Child-headed Families on Preschool Learners' Class Participation: A Case of Mwingi Zone, Kitui County-Kenya

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Abstract

This study was designed to investigate whether child-headed families have influence on pre-school learners' class participation. The study was carried out in Mwingi zone of Kitui County Kenya. The zone had a total of 67 public pre-schools and the study targeted all the 67 public pre-schools, 1030 pre-school learners and 88 pre-school teachers. The researcher employed descriptive survey design so as to get information from the sampled respondents. The researcher obtained the sample size of the study by using both probability and non-probability sampling techniques. The sampling techniques included stratified random sampling and purposive sampling. The schools in the zone were grouped into five clusters namely: Musukini, Kanzanzu, Mwingi, Ithumbi and Kyethani. The researcher used a representative sample of 10% of the targeted preschool learners and 20.5% of the targeted preschool teachers. To collect data from the respondents, the researcher used questionnaires and observation checklists. The questionnaires were used to collect data from pre-school teachers, while observation checklists were used to collect data from pre-school learners. After collecting the data, the researcher processed it by editing, coding, classifying and tabulating it and then analyzed the processed data using descriptive analysis, frequency distribution tables and percentages and Pearson Correlation Tables. The findings of the study indicated that there was a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.891$, $P < 0.05$) between child-headed families and the class participation of pre-school learners. The study recommended that, the pre-schools should be encouraged to be conducting frequent guidance and counseling sessions for learners from child-headed families. Pre-school class teachers should also identify the learners who are not active in class participation and encourage them to be active in class by offering rewards.

Key Words: *Family structure, child-headed family, Pre-school, Pre-school learner, Class Participation, School access*

1. Introduction

Over the past fifty years, most of the developed world has experienced dramatic changes in the organization of families something that may impact the wellbeing of children by affecting their access to or success in school (Frisco, Muller & Frank, 2007). According to Fomby, Cavanagh and Goode (2011), there is a correlation between family structure and learners' outcomes as they found that learners who grow up in single-parent families and learners with stepparents have poor learning outcomes than those who live with two married biological parents.

A study carried out in America by Frisco, Muller and Frank (2007) presents evidence for a link between family structures and educational achievement. For example, Potter (2010) observes that divorce and separation correlate positively with diminished emotional, social and school achievement and performance. Potter's observation is in line with Kelly, Whitley and Campos (2010) study which explored the developmental status of 74 young African-American grandchildren being raised by their grandparents in Georgia. Fifty-seven grandchildren aged 1-5 years were ultimately evaluated by a team of children development specialists. Based on the evaluation 40 (70.18%)

grandchildren had a verified developmental disability including fetal alcohol syndrome, 32.5% cognitive delay, 12.5% gross motor delay, 7.5% communication and socio-emotional delay and 2.5% fine motor delay.

Another study in US cities by Cooper, Osborne, Beck and McLanahan (2011) shows that boys have increased externalizing behaviour problems at age of five years if they were born to unmarried mothers. Moreover, a Norwegian research found that children who experience divorce early in life have lower educational outcomes and that the effect of divorce is strongest when the child is young (Steele, Single-Rushton & Kravdal, 2009). Although only a few empirical studies examine the links between family structure and learners' outcomes in Norway, there is some evidence of more school problems and lower academic achievement among children who have experienced divorce (Lauglo, 2008). Children who experience a family disruption might have lower average educational attainment either because of parenting deficits or because of other deleterious changes that accompany the process of family disruption such as economic vulnerability (Ermisch & Francescon, 2001).

A study carried out in Zimbabwe by Makufa, Drew, Mashumba and Kambeu (2001) shows that children living in child-headed families face stigmatization, discrimination and isolation such that they have reduced self-esteem and lack of confidence to participate in activities something that affects their learning outcomes. Their study findings of Makufa and others (2001) are supported by the studies carried out by UNICEF (2012), whose study findings indicate that effects of child-headed families include adverse impacts on cognitive capacity, poor language development, deficits in school readiness, mental and emotional health, social conduct and behaviour and teenage pregnancy, erratic school attendance, poor academic achievements at school and lower levels of education.

A report by Uwezo Kenya (2016) reveals that nationally only 3 out of 10 pupils in class three can do class two class work. The report further continues to state that children from poorer households consistently show lower learning skills and that many children across the three East Africa countries (Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania) lack actual literacy and numeracy outcomes. According to records held in Mwingi Zonal Education Office, data shows that from 2013 to 2016 there has been low transition rate of pre-school learners to class one. For these years, the transition rate has been ranging between 60% - 68%. Similarly, data obtained from the same Office for the year 2013 reported that many learners were classified as most vulnerable children (MVCs) due to the nature of their family backgrounds for example grandparent-headed families (Mwingi Zonal Office, 2013). Hence the objective of the study was to investigate the influence of child-headed families on preschool learners' class participation in Mwingi Zone, Mwingi Sub- County, Kitui County, Kenya.

Children from child-headed households face many challenges including stigma, shortage of resources, increased risk of starvation and malnutrition, increased school absenteeism and withdrawal, poor class or school performance, inadequate access to medical care and sexual exploitation (Skovdal & Daniel, 2012). According to a study carried out in Thailand on by Safman (2004) on impact of orphanhood on children affected by AIDS, the orphaned children lived impoverished life, faced significant financial hardships and were more likely to fall behind or drop out of school. Similarly, a research study carried out by Case, Paxson and Ableidinger (2004) in 10 Sub-Saharan countries including Tanzania shows that orphans systematically have lower school participation than non-orphans due to their reduced self-esteem as a result of stigmatization, discrimination and isolation.

A study carried out in Kenya by Nyambedha, Simiyu and Jens (2001) on policy implications of the inadequate support and the everyday life experiences of children and adolescents living in child-headed households in Western Kenya found out that orphans are more likely to drop out of school due to food, clothing, schooling and medical care problems. Ochieng, Nyamwange and Winga (2018) in their study carried out in Kenya on psychological implications of HIV and AIDS on child-headed households affirm that many orphans experience increased levels of psychological and emotional distress, are at risk of exploitation including labour and sexual abuse and also are not in school due to poverty, lack of parental guidance and encouragement as well as heavy domestic responsibilities and stigmatization. Although a number of studies have been carried out on the influence of family structure on learning, none of those studies has been carried out in Mwingi Zone. The target population used in these previous studies are also different from the preschool learners from public schools which this study targeted. The studies have also used different research designs such as ex post facto research design, longitudinal survey design and correlational and comparative research designs which are different from the descriptive survey research design this study used and therefore research gaps exist which may result in the study yielding different results.

2. Research Methods

The study adopted descriptive survey design to study the influence of family structure on pre-school learners' class participation in public pre-schools in Mwingi Zone. Descriptive survey research design is a type of study conducted to generate explanatory information or characteristics about a specific population or phenomenon. The research design is a strategic plan that sets out the broad outline and key features to be undertaken in a research study and it is not only appropriate for data that is obtained but also an appropriate mode of enquiry for making inferences about the large group of people from the data drawn on the relatively small number of individuals from the group. The design was appropriate for the study because it was targeting a large group of people and therefore it was easy to make generalizations from the representative sample of the target population. The design is also less expensive and can be done within a relatively short period of time and therefore suitable for the research which was self-funded.

The target population for this study was 1030 pre-school learners and 88 pre-school teachers from 67 public pre-schools from Mwingi Zone in Kitui County- Kenya. The researcher used both the stratified random sampling technique and purposive sampling to obtain the sample size of the study. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select the sample size in the study whereby the researcher to obtain a representative sample after stratifying the schools in the zone into 5 strata or sub groups based on their geographical locations namely; Musukini with 280 pre-school learners and 22 pre-school teachers, Kanzanzu with 160 pre-school learners and 15 pre-school teachers, Mwingi with 260 pre-school learners and 31 pre-school teachers, Ithumbi with 140 pre-school learners and 14 pre-school teachers and Kyethani with 190 pre-school learners and 16 pre-school teachers.

According to Gay (1992), sample size of 10% of the accessible population is enough for a big population. An effective population sample is the one that is not only accessible to the researcher but also representative and diverse (Kombo& Tromp, 2006). Based on that argument, the researcher's sample size of 10% of preschool learners and 20.5% of preschool teachers is an effective population sample. For pilot and test –retest studies, the researcher used purposive sampling to get respondents.

Table 2: Sample Size

Respondent	Population size	Sample size	Sample (%)
Pre-school learners	1030	103	10.0%
Pre-school teachers	88	18	20.5%
Total	1118	121	

The researcher used questionnaires and observation checklists. The questionnaires were used to collect data from pre-school teachers on influence of child-headed families on pre-school learners' class participation in public pre-schools in Mwingi zone. The researcher used observation checklists to collect data from pre-school learners as this enabled the researcher to get accurate data which measure the overt behaviour of the respondents (Kombo& Tromp, 2006). The researcher observed the pre-school learners' behaviour in terms of their class participation.

3. Research Results

The questionnaires were administered to 118 pre-school teachers while check lists were administered to 103 pre-school pupils. The collected data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics where frequency tables. Inferential statistics, that is, correlation analysis was used to test the relationship between the independent and dependent variables followed by data interpretation and discussion of the findings. The questionnaires for this study were administered on pre-school teachers. The objective for this study was to determine the influence of child-headed families on pre-school learners' class participation in Mwingi Zone, Mwingi Sub-County, Kitui County, Kenya. To achieve this objective, the respondents were required to indicate whether there were pupils in their class who have been living in child-headed families. The results were presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Presence of child-headed families

Number	Frequency	Percent
Less than 5	13	72.3
5 – 9	4	22.2
10 – 14	1	5.5
15 – 19	0	0.0
More than 19	0	0.0
Total	18	100

Table 4 shows that majority of the respondents (72.3%) indicated that there were less than 5 pupils in their classes with child-headed families. This shows that child-headed families existed but they were not very many. The reason given for the presence of these child-headed families was demise of both parents, abandonment or neglect by both parents and imprisonment of parents. These results agree with UNICEF (2004) who argue that millions of children in the world are vulnerable due to impact of HIV and AIDS pandemic, poverty, conflict diseases and accidents.

Table 5: Presence of Truancy among children from child-headed families

Response	Frequency	Percent
Yes	12	66.7
No	6	33.3
Total	18	100

It was also established that 66.7% of the respondents indicated there were pupils from child-headed families with truancy problems in their classes. Some of the reasons given for this were; stigmatization, lack of adequate learning materials, low self-esteem and lack of enough food among others. The respondents were also asked to rate the class participation of children from child-headed families. The responses were presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Class participation of children from child-headed families

Response	Frequency	Percent
Excellent	0	0.0
Very good	0	0.0
Good	2	11.1
Fair	7	38.9
Poor	9	50.0
Total	18	100

Table 6 established that 50% of the class participation among children from child-headed families were poor. This was followed by 38.9% who were fair in class participation. These results agree with Makufa and others (2001) who argue that child-headed families face stigmatization, discrimination and isolation such that they have reduced self-esteem and lack confidence to participate in class activities. The researcher further sought to find out whether the child-headed families have a relationship with the class participation of pre-school learners. This was done using Pearson product moment correlation measure of relationships between child-headed families and the class participation of pre-school learners. The results were presented in Table 7.

Table 7: Correlation between child-headed families and class participation of pre-school learners

Variables		Child-headed families	Class participation of pre-school learners'
Child-headed	Pearson Correlation	1	-.891**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	18	18
Class participation of pre-school learners'	Pearson Correlation	-.891**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	18	18

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Results in Table 7 reveals that, there is a strong negative correlation ($r = -0.891$, $P < 0.05$) between child-headed families and the class participation of pre-school learners. This implies that child-headed families negatively influence class participation. These results agree with Nyambedha, Simiyu and Jens (2001) who argue that inadequate support and the everyday life experiences of children and adolescents living in child-headed families negatively affected their school attendance and class participation. The results also are in line with the findings of Makufa and others (2001) who argue that children from child-headed families have reduced self-esteem and lack confidence to participate in class activities due to stigmatization, discrimination and isolation. It is evident from the various studies carried out that there is enormous negative effect on academics of children from child-headed households.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made some conclusion. It was concluded that there were varied family structures in all the schools under the study which included child-headed families. The study concluded that pre-school learners from the child-headed families had higher rates of truancy problems which implied that child-headed families had a negative influence on pre-school learners' class participation and school attendance.

5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher made the following recommendations: The government through the area chiefs should identify the child-headed families so that they can be offered the necessary psychological and emotional support through guidance and counseling. They can also be provided with food stuff, clothing and learning materials. This will raise their self-esteem. The pre-school administration should to organize frequent guidance and counseling for learners from child-headed families. This will help them understand the importance of classroom participation. Also the pre-school class teachers should identify the pupils who are not active in class participation and motivate them to participate by offering them rewards. Pre-school teachers should try to identify the pre-school learners' strengths and build on them as this will help in enhancing their self-esteem. The pre-school administration and pre-school teachers should also try to reach out to learners from child-headed families and ensure that they give them educational and emotional support as well as providing them a nurturing school environment. The school administration should as well place such learners with the most stable and experienced teachers who will ensure that they get the attention and classroom stability they require as they will not be able to single out such learners because of their family status in front of their peers or teachers.

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